

VZCZCXRO3865
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHMS #0070 0291218
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 291218Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9187
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0519
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0410
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS MUSCAT 000070

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/PPD, NEA/PI, AND INR/R/MR
STATE PASS USTR FOR N. MOORJANI, J. BUNTIN
LONDON FOR TSOU
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USCENTCOM FOR PLUSH
FOREIGN PRESS CENTER FOR SILAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: GAZA STRIP; LEBANON; ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS
MEET IN CAIRO.

11. SUMMARY: Editorials in private daily "al Watan" call the U.S. veto of the UNSC draft resolution on Gaza "typical discriminatory policy". Another "al Watan" editorial states that Arab foreign ministers find themselves at a difficult crossroad at the Arab Leagues meeting on Lebanon. State daily "Oman" highlights the importance of this meeting taking place in Cairo and recommends that Arabs take more active steps to force Israel to stop the blockade.
END SUMMARY.

FOISTING GAZA ON ITS NEIGHBORS

12. On January 26, "Al-Watan" (private Arabic daily; circulation 42,000) comments that the Gaza blockade is a tactic to separate Gaza, impose responsibility for it upon Egypt and Jordan, and continue expanding illegal settlements. "The American insistence on including the so-called 'Palestinian rockets' in the UN Security Counsel draft resolution ... is not new in the context of the totally and clearly biased American policy to Israel. However, it is another action added to the list that has hindered hundreds of UN resolutions condemning Israeli terrorism. What is yet more dangerous here is that while the world is busy with the humanitarian situations in Gaza (in the absence of food, electricity, water and medical supplies) Israel is sending messages to its friends that its security is threatened, and so Gaza should be separated from it and added to Egypt and Jordan, who should take full responsibility - that is, after adding its illegal settlements to its borders. In this way, the Israelis set the stage for settling the Palestinian issue and sneaking around what was called Bush's promise for two states."

ARABS AT A CROSSROADS

13. "Al-Watan's" January 27 commentary states that Arab foreign ministers find themselves at a difficult crossroad in regard to Lebanon's political crisis, saying "Lebanon does not Want Painkillers":

"Arab foreign ministers will find themselves in this meeting at a crossroads: one imposed on them by the difference in point of views among Lebanese parties towards Arab initiatives working to remove Lebanon from political, economic, security, and social disturbance. The second: fear of rejection from Lebanese parties of this initiative, which will have a negative reflection on the Arabs'

performance...It is no secret that there are very complicated issues in Lebanon, making it an easy target for its enemies forward plans for redrawing the map of the region."

COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT IS STATE TERRORISM

14. The state-owned Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) notes that, while the Arab foreign ministers' meeting is ostensibly to discuss Lebanon, the situation in Palestine weighs heavy on the agenda:

"The ugly blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza is in violation of all international laws and principals and totally conflicts with the fourth Geneva treaty - therefore, it falls, as collective punishment for all Palestinian people, in the list of crimes against humanity. The blockade and its accompanying violence is state terrorism that will not prepare the environment for any peace or even push negotiation between Palestinians and Israel as hoped. The Arabs having offered all that they have, and indeed having reached the end of the road through Arab initiatives that all Arab countries agreed on for a total and just compromise with Israel, than it will take more than drafting a resolution of condemnation to ending the blockade and return life to normal in Gaza. Will the ministers be able to make Israel take action?"

FONTENEAU